



DONATE

ACCOUNT

DONATE

*The Salt Lake Tribune*

Commentary: Brigham Young's Catholic daughter loved her father, loathed polygamy and lived amid conflict

"I am most happy in my devout belief of the holy Catholic Church," she wrote to her sister. "...It is wrong for you to harp against my holy belief — I don't attempt to convert you to my belief."



(Find a Grave) Dora Young Hagan as an older woman.

By Michael Patrick O'Brien | Special to The Tribune | Jan. 3, 2026, 6:00 a.m.

| Updated: Jan. 5, 2026, 9:40 a.m.

 Add as Preferred Source

 Comment

Brigham Young's only Catholic daughter lived a colorful and conflicted life.

[Eudora “Dora” Lovina Young Dunford Hagan](#) was born in Salt Lake City in May 1852. Her mother, [Lucy Bigelow Young](#), was one of 16 plural wives who had children with the man known as the Lion of the Lord.

Dora and her two younger sisters ([Susa Young Gates](#) and [Mabel Young Sanborn](#)) grew up as Latter-day Saint royalty in the Lion House, one of Young's homes. Romney Burke's 2022 [book](#) about Susa says the house was “full of half-siblings who in a given week might include four babes in arms, six toddlers, five or six preschoolers, 13 or more school-age children between 6 and 14 years, [and] several older offspring in their late teens to early 20s.”



Despite the crowded conditions, Burke says, “Brigham's families lived in relative splendor.” The family compound — a 50-acre plot next to Salt Lake City's Temple Square — “was well-appointed, self-sufficient” and included a store, flour mill, barn, corrals, garden, orchard, gymnasium, even a swimming pool.

Dora was witty, popular and beautiful but rebellious. Ignoring all objections, she eloped at age 18, running off to the home of a Protestant minister to marry boyfriend Morely Dunford, the son of a Main Street shoe merchant.

The New York Times said Dora's actions “scandalized” the Saints and “enraged” her father. Poor Susa — coerced into the conspiracy — got blamed for it, too, and was banished with her mother to live in Young's [St. George home](#).

Susa's writings say Morely was "industrious...with a sunny disposition" but lacked self-control, especially regarding alcohol. After giving birth to two sons, Dora divorced him in 1876 and moved to St. George to rejoin her family.



Get Mormon Land newsletter. Explore the news and culture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints every Thursday.

drobinson@parsonsbehle



This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google Privacy Policy and Terms of Service apply.

Perhaps to appease her worried parents, Dora flirted with plural marriage. In February 1877, The Salt Lake Tribune reported that "the prophet's wayward lamb" was about to be "sealed" to someone.

It turned out to be future church President Wilford Woodruff, then age 70. [Young married Dora and Woodruff](#) in March 1877, but they separated a year later after their newborn child died.

Dora was devastated when her [father, the longest-serving president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, died in August 1877](#). She attended his funeral at the Salt Lake Tabernacle along with some 15,000 other people.



Burke's book says Young's last words to Dora's mother, Lucy, were "take care of the girls." That mandate proved to be a challenge. Susa married twice and Mabel thrice — the last time to a gentile.



(Find a Grave) From left: Susa Young, Lucy Bigelow, Mabel Young and Dora Young.

Booted from the church

Making matters more difficult, Dora and several of Young's children sued his estate and challenged his will. In 1879, Dora married [Albert Hagan](#), the lawyer who helped her win a favorable settlement in that litigation.

Hagan's law firm was a high-profile force in the courts. He [represented Mark Twain](#) in a Utah copyright lawsuit and his partner Frank Tilford had helped prosecute [John D. Lee](#) for the infamous 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre.

After the estate lawsuit, the church [excommunicated](#) Dora and the other litigious heirs. In May 1880, the Deseret News declared that the apostates had "falsely charged their father's executors and the authorities of the church with defrauding the heirs."

Publicly rejected by the church into which she was born, Dora left Utah and adopted the Catholic faith of her new husband. The couple moved to several places where Hagan practiced law, including Chicago; Denver; New Mexico; Spokane, Washington; and Idaho.



Dora was in the prime of her life.

In September 1880, Dora told a Chicago newspaper that she adored and missed her father. “I loved him beyond anything that words can tell. ... He was the most magnetic person I ever knew or heard of.”

(Salt Lake Tribune archives) Brigham Young, second president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

But she hated polygamy. “There was an outward semblance of goodwill, but, in reality, the Mormon wives hate each other with deadly hatred. This alone is one of the most evident evil effects of the dreadful system, this hatred that exists under roofs called homes, what are often perfect hells, and scenes of the most disgraceful quarrels.”

The Hagans settled in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. Two of their children died young; two others grew into adulthood.

Albert established himself as a respected attorney, practicing in northern Idaho and eastern Washington. He died in his early 50s in 1895.

Albert's death dealt a financial and emotional blow to Dora. She struggled to make ends meet, living with her son in Southern California for a time and then staying with her sister Mabel in the Northwest.

(Utah State Historical Society) This photo of Brigham Young, from an 1898 clipping, shows him with a number of his wives.

A home in her new faith

Even after Albert's death, Utah gossip mongers hounded Dora. In 1905, the same year her mother, Lucy, died, The Salt Lake Herald published a series of wild and often inaccurate articles about Dora.

One suggested Dora engaged in multiple "entangling matrimonial alliances" and had conspired to lock Albert's first wife away in an asylum. The Herald also alleged Dora had apostatized from the LDS Church and soon would do the same to the Catholics by marrying a fourth time.

Dora was and remained, in reality, a devoted Catholic. She was active in her Pasadena parish and was known to be close friends with Baltimore [Cardinal James Gibbons](#), one of the best-known American Catholics of his time.

Her new faith stuck with Dora's descendants as well.

Her son, a talented singer, performed with a distinguished Catholic choir. And her great-grandson joined Utah's old [Huntsville monastery](#) and is one of the Trappist monks I wrote about in my 2021 book, "[Monastery Mornings: My Unusual Boyhood Among the Saints and Monks.](#)"

Newspaper accounts say the adult Young/Bigelow sisters and their families visited one another frequently. Dora even stayed involved in the [Brigham Young Family Association](#).

Dora's Catholicism, however, created conflict with Susa, who had become an outspoken defender of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

(Signature Books) Susa Young Gates encouraged her sister to rejoin the Latter-day Saint fold.

In response to Susa's passionate pleas that she return to their once-shared faith, Dora wrote: "I am so sorry you are so troubled about me. In my spiritual life, I am most happy in my devout belief of the holy Catholic Church....It is wrong for you to harp against my holy belief — I don't attempt to convert you to my belief."

That's a painful conversation many other Utah families may have had through the years.

After a long illness, Dora died at her daughter's home in Salt Lake City in October 1921. She was 69. Her funeral was at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, and she is buried in [Mount Olivet Cemetery](#).

The Salt Lake Tribune published this obituary for Dora Young Hagan on Oct. 22, 1921.

Despite the religious divide between them, Susa loved the older sister she called "the idol" of both her and Brigham's hearts — but who never returned to their church.

At the end of Susa's life, she lamented in her journal, "Poor, tragic, selfish, vain Dora — where are you?"

Another Utah Trappist monk, my friend Father Patrick Boyle, heard that type of question, too, often asked by Catholics, Latter-day Saints and even nonbelievers about their loved ones on unexpected spiritual detours.

He would usually smile and respond, “They’re right where God wants them to be.”

(Michael O'Brien) Writer and attorney Michael Patrick O'Brien.

Note to readers • Michael Patrick O'Brien is a writer and attorney living in Salt Lake City who frequently represents *The Salt Lake Tribune* in legal matters. His book “*Monastery Mornings: My Unusual Boyhood Among the Saints and Monks*,” was chosen by the League of Utah Writers as the best nonfiction book in 2022. His new holiday novel, tentatively titled “*The Merry Matchmaker Monks of Shamrock Valley*,” will be published in time for Christmas 2026. He blogs at theboymonk.com.

Support free news for Utah

sltrib.com is now free to access — no subscription required. We made this decision because we believe access to trustworthy, independent news shouldn't depend on what you can afford — especially as misinformation and AI-generated content continue to rise.

Free to read doesn't mean free to produce. Our reporters show up every day to ask hard questions and hold powerful institutions to account. That work takes resources. As a nonprofit newsroom, we rely on support from people who believe it matters. Make a donation today to fund local news that serves Utah communities.

You can help us bring more local news to more communities today.

\$15

\$25

\$35

DONATE TODAY

RELATED STORIES

Did LDS prophet Brigham Young ask a Catholic nun to be his 28th wife?

Commentary: From Latter-day Saint to Catholic saint? The incredible spiritual journey of a mystical Utah native.

Commentary: Anti-Mormonism, polygamy fights, newspaper wars and Salt Lake City's stinkpot scandal of 1885

Commentary: This is the place not just for Brigham's band of Saints but also for a benevolent corps of Catholic nuns


MC

- 1 In Grand County, system reluctant
- 2 A dispute over a d to
a YouTube crusade in
Utah.
- 3 Dubbing June '1 ride
rightward shift :
- 4 Here's the latest
including when
- 5 Kevin O'Leary agrees to cut Box Elder County data
center project area in half after 'significant' demands
from Senate leader

Sponsored Story

Utah Artist Fellowship Program awards \$90,000 to 18 artists

Sponsored: These awards recognize exceptional creativity and encourage career advancement and growth.



T-Mobile

**Switch to T-Mobile,
we'll pay off your
phone up to 4 lines**

Via virtual prepaid card when you switch; allow 15 days.

Switch and Save

See full terms.

FROM THE WEB



Landlord bans AC? Cincinnati engineer invents no-install solution!

Consumer World | Sponsored

Honey: The Greatest Enemy of Memory Loss (See How to Use It)

**Memory Loss Begins When a Person Eats This
Breakfast Food - Do You Eat It?**

wisetio.com | Sponsored

**Cardiologist: 2 Veggies Will Kill Stubborn
Belly Fat Overnight (Try It)**

Try It Before Bed!

Health Weekly | Sponsored

**Why This \$49 invention is Making \$800
Pressure Washers obsolete**

Consumer Check | Sponsored

**Surgeons: This Simple Method Will End
Knee Pain & Arthritis (Try It)**

The Real Culprit Is Here

Health Weekly | Sponsored

Why Is Everyone Quitting Gmail?

Proton | Sponsored

By Michael Patrick O'Brien | Special to The Tribune

CONNECT

Facebook

✕ X

Instagram

YouTube

RSS



MEMBERSHIP

Get a Print Edition

Donate

Email Newsletters

Login to your Print Account

Login to your Digital Account

Supporter FAQs

Print & Account FAQ

Help and Contact Info

ABOUT US

History and Mission

Our Nonprofit Model

Board and Advisers

Officers and Staff

Supporters

Tax Filing and Governance

Share Your Opinion

Meet the Editorial Board

Privacy Policy

California Privacy

Editorial Policies and Ethics

MORE

Advertise with Us

Legal Notices

Store

Archives

Story Tips

Support The Tribune

Join The First Amendment Society

Gift Acceptance Policy

Cookie Preferences

Commenting Policy

- [ABOUT US](#)
- [DONATE](#)
- [TERMS OF SERVICE](#)
- [SUPPORTERS FAQ](#)
- [PRIVACY POLICY](#)
- [PRINT FAQ](#)
- [EDITORIAL POLICY](#)
- [PRINT EDITION](#)
- [NEWS TIPS](#)
- [EMAIL NEWSLETTERS](#)
- [ADVERTISE](#)
- [JOIN THE FIRST AMENDMENT SOCIETY](#)
- [CONTACT US/HELP](#)
- [SUPPORT THE TRIBUNE](#)
- [MEET THE EDITORIAL BOARD](#)
- [SHARE YOUR OPINION](#)
- [GIFT ACCEPTANCE POLICY](#)
- [COOKIE PREFERENCES](#)



Report a missed paper by emailing support@sltrib.com or calling 801-237-2900

For e-edition questions or comments, contact customer support 801-237-2900 or email support@sltrib.com

sltrib.com © 1996-2026 The Salt Lake Tribune. All rights reserved.

The Salt Lake Tribune